

Representative Ted Lieu (D-CA)

Testimony to the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee (HACD)

March 15, 2016

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee, I want to thank you for the tireless work and effort that you and your staff put forward to ensure that our Nation remains safe. As a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Air Force Reserve who previously served on active duty, I have firsthand experience with the support this Subcommittee provides to our men and women in uniform. I would like to commend you for holding this hearing today and providing Members with the opportunity to share their thoughts on national security priorities.

This is the second time that I have testified in front of this Subcommittee on the Navy's tactical aviation shortfall. While I know that you have an intimate familiarity with the issue, allow me to highlight several key facts that will affect our warfighter. Last year, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) testified to Congress that he faced a "Super Hornet shortfall" of 24 to 36 aircraft. Congress, and this Subcommittee in particular, responded by adding 5 Super Hornets in last year's budget. However, due to higher than expected Super Hornet utilization rates, and delays in processing legacy aircraft through depots, the shortfall remains at roughly 36 aircraft. That number grows exponentially in out years as our Super Hornets age. The warfighting effect is that there aren't sufficient aircraft to train properly for squadrons that prepare for deployment, and a surge capability with multiple carriers in a region is in doubt. Something must be done.

In addition to testifying to the challenge, the Navy has taken steps this year to try to mitigate the shortfall. In the Fiscal Year 2017 budget, it added two aircraft in the Overseas

Contingency Operations (OCO) account, and planned for 14 Super Hornets in next year's budget. Further, the Navy submitted an "unfunded requirement" of 14 Super Hornets for this year. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus testified that he added those aircraft as his "top priority" over concern for the shortfall and maintaining the F/A-18 production line as an international sale was delayed longer than expected.

While the unfunded request addresses a warfighting demand, keeping the F/A-18 line strong is also important to my district. California's 33rd District manufactures the fuselage, the radar and other critical components of every F/A-18 aircraft for the Navy. An estimated 7,000 men and women support the Navy warfighter through direct and indirect jobs, covering seven major supplier companies and \$400 million in economic impact annually. I have been to these facilities and see the passion that they have when they talk about how much their work means to our Nation and the pilots who fly the aircraft. The Navy's unfunded requirement can benefit the warfighter and those on the home front that work every day to support them.

The Subcommittee must weigh many factors as it crafts its budget, but if F/A-18 aircraft are not added this year, the production line would be placed under enormous pressure to continue production, and the Navy may not have the ability to address its shortfall in future years. I hope that as you craft the Fiscal Year 2017 budget for the Department of Defense, you consider the Navy's top unfunded priority of Super Hornets one that your Subcommittee can support as well. The strike fighter shortfall is a serious issue, and I look forward to working with you throughout the year on addressing it for the Navy.

Thank you.